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## BOOK REVIEWS.

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*King Arthur and His Knights.* By MAUDE L. RADFORD, Instructor in English in the University of Chicago. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1903. Pp. 272.

THIS volume is a collection of narratives taken from Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and from Tennyson's *Idyls of the King*, and so adapted and arranged as to form a reading-book for children in the fifth grade of the public schools, though it is cannily suggested in the preface that it may prove serviceable for the third and fourth, and for the sixth and seventh as well. In its character as a reading-book it should prove an acceptable addition to the teacher's resources. It is clear and simple, offering a very pretty and diversified vocabulary; it is neatly arranged with a view to the single and unified lesson; it has a small pronouncing index, the use of which will, no doubt, add greatly to the dignity and confidence of the fifth grade.

There is unquestionably much in the King Arthur romances that should contribute to the pleasure and wholesome culture of the elementary child. Epic activity, bold and generous deeds tempered by gentleness and reverence—this is the atmosphere of the best side of the Arthur stories. This is precisely the atmosphere into which one longs to lead the older children of the elementary school. In making a book for the child out of the Arthur legends, one must do with his material as Malory did with his—regard it as the mere stuff of human nature and life, a storehouse of treasures out of which one may choose according to his pleasure or his need. The child's needs should dictate the choice and arrangement in this case.

But he who offers to choose among the Arthur stories such as may be given to the child should be wise and experienced, knowing thoroughly well his stories and his child; for the pitfalls are many—quite as many in Chrétien de Troyes and Malory as in Tennyson.

First of these is the pitfall of that fantastic feudal gallantry which Chrétien and Malory substituted for the forthright chivalric business and earnestness of the older legendary romances. In the elementary grades the children are still mere undifferentiated human beings, and should be kept so. Suggestions of "ladies" to be "won" and to be "served" usher them before time into an unknown world, and are needless, since there is in the same material a legitimate sufficiency of lions to be hunted and giants to be overcome.

It is true that the psychology and *modus operandi* of love and love-making, innocent or guilty, are so alien to children of this age as to pass harmlessly by them, when these notions constitute a necessary link in a narrative otherwise suitable for them. But it is surely a mistake to linger with the little people over any of these experiences. He who would retell the Arthur stories must be wary here, so difficult is it to put together the stories into any kind of a whole without using this scarlet thread of guilty passion, or substituting for it something

"nice" but wishy-washy. We have only to compare the grim justice of Malory's Modred with Tennyson's inadequate and sentimental handling of his character and function. Miss Radford has skirted these difficulties rather neatly. Her presentation of the ladies and the love affairs is skilfully colorless, the emphasis being laid for the most part upon the deeds which they inspire.

Another of the pitfalls is to be found in the religious mysticism, not to say fanaticism, which Malory wove into the Arthur cycle when he incorporated with it the legends of the Holy Grail, and which Tennyson chose to make the pivotal motive in his downfall of the Round Table. Tennyson, writing for mature readers and presenting a whole cycle, could, stroke by stroke, build up the impression of this burning zeal, this hypnotic trance of enthusiasm that led men away after wandering fires, forgetting labor and duty. But simplified to suit a child's reading-book, and fitted to the comprehension of a ten-year-old, it is likely to appear as a vague and mistaken piety, the effect of which is quite out of proportion to its importance. Since, however, Miss Radford, being a good Tennysonian, chose the Holy Grail defection as the beginning of the end, she has made a more vigorous and convincing chapter of it than could have been expected.

There is, it would seem, a temptation scarcely to be resisted, to introduce into any arrangement of the Arthur stories the symbolism that lay obviously upon the surface even in the *Morte d'Arthur*, which Tennyson heightened into an almost oppressive system of sophisticated and parochial doctrine. Symbolistic art but baffles or unduly forces the child. To him the sacred outside appearance of things is enough. On this point Miss Radford has been, on the whole, wise. One could wish that she had followed Malory in Gareth's fight with the fourth knight, instead of adopting Tennyson's evangelistic bit of symbolism; and her interpretation of the Tennysonian architecture of Merlin's hall might be profitably dropped out. By the way, it is always a pity to make little of Merlin. He is the most permanently interesting figure in the cycle. He is Odysseus among the Greeks, the sacred bard among the warriors, the subtle one, always so appealing and so satisfying to a child's imagination. Indeed, epic activity and intellectual dominance, whether the latter take the shape of wisdom or magic, are perhaps the most satisfying elements in the literary subject-matter of the fifth grade. The Arthur stories afford these in the richest abundance. It is therefore a mistake to turn aside in a child's book to idyllic and sentimental details, or to fall into a modern reflective and idyllic manner. Something soft and meditative in the whole cycle would justify Tennyson in his large presentation. But when we choose for the child, it might be best to drop out that side. Miss Radford has the modern consciousness enriched by the Tennyson tradition, and we find in the little book many of these idyllic details: "Arthur wore a gold crown, but it was no brighter than his hair, and the blue truquoises with which it was set were no bluer than his eyes." In the midst of the *melée* in the battle of the eleven kings "the noise drowned the sweet songs of the birds, but still they sang and flew about gayly, all unaware of the grim death struggle going on beneath them." It may be that the design is here to introduce "a background of nature," by way of contrast; but one fears that this is an artistic effect thrown away on the fifth grade, and perhaps entirely out of place in such a narrative.

But because it does meet these difficulties, on the whole, with taste and skill, one must regard it as a hopeful book. It is not the final one to be made

out of the material and for the purpose, because it does not yet recognize clearly the needs and tastes of the child. But it should be, and it will be, a source of artistic pleasure and imaginative enlargement to the children to whom it is given.

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*Language Lessons from Literature.* By ALICE WOODWORTH COOLEY assisted by W. F. WEBSTER. New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1903. Book I, pp. xv, 200; Book II, pp. xxx, 389. Appendix, pp. 26.

THE evolution of the language book would make a most interesting subject for study. Ever since the revolt against formal English grammar in the elementary school, so-called language books have appeared and disappeared at frequent intervals. They have disappeared because no one seemed to have the courage to write a book on language that should frankly be what its name implied. Most of the books that have been written have contained too much grammar thinly disguised as language lessons, the facts of language in them being smothered under pages of examples of detached sentences selected chiefly for their ethical value. Recently, however, a few good language books have been published—books which, like these of Mrs. Cooley's are destined to crowd the introduction of a text-book in formal English grammar up into the last year of the elementary school.

Mrs. Cooley's reasons for writing her books are clearly and convincingly given in the preface to Book I and she has actually written the books that her preface leads one to expect. There is no indefiniteness of aim either in stating her convictions, or in developing her methods.

The first lesson is admirably selected to hold the interest of the child. It is a delightful lesson on one of Murillo's inimitable pictures of children and is handled most skilfully. This is followed by poems, and stories in prose, that the child may realize that thought may be expressed either by brush or pen—by picture, poetry, or prose. By means of the story the idea of the sentence is developed; then the paragraph. Before Book I is finished, if the teacher has caught the spirit of Mrs. Cooley's book, the child has become acquainted with much fine literature, and has also been made familiar with correct forms, and good usage in simple English construction.

The plan of the first book is continued in the second. The selections are admirable and show not only a fine appreciation of literary values, but also a sympathetic knowledge of what will go straight to the heart of a child. Throughout both books great attention is given to content as well as form, and nowhere is time or energy wasted on that which is immaterial or uninteresting. Indeed, the books stand for discriminating and exquisitely sympathetic work. The atmosphere of the books is wholesome and invigorating, and every lesson is full of suggestion. Mrs. Cooley makes much of the voice of the teacher by frequently asking her to lend the beauty of her voice "to the rhym of the poet." When in the development of a lesson a fact about language is needed, it is given simply and concisely. The child is even asked to stop and learn a rule, if that rule will help him in applying the principle involved. The entire presentation of subject-